

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK FLANAGAN:

A CONTRIBUTION TO A SURVEY OF LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK

Interviewee: Jack Flanagan

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Description

Jack Flanagan, a third generation Comstocker, was born in Virginia City, Nevada, on April 5, 1910. His grandparents, who emigrated to the Comstock at the height of its nineteenth century mining boom, were among the men and women who built Virginia City. One grandfather was a railroad man; the other was a hard rock miner. The first was killed in a railroad accident at Medicine Bow, Wyoming; the other died of silicosis contracted in the Yellow Jacket mine. Their wives, undaunted by these tragedies, went on to raise large families. From these families emerged Jack Flanagan's mother and father, who also participated in the life of the Comstock Lode. Jack Flanagan recounts the story of this family, which parallels the story of the Comstock Lode.

The history of the Comstock Lode did not end with its second generation. Mining continued in Virginia City, and Jack Flanagan worked as a hard rock miner in the Hale & Norcross tunnel during the 1930s. Mr. Flanagan reminisces about his mining experiences, and he also takes the reader on a fascinating tour of the Hale & Norcross mine.

Mining temporarily abated with the outbreak of the Second World War. Gold and silver were declared non-strategic metals, and the mines on the Comstock were closed. Although he left the Comstock during the war, Jack Flanagan returned home after the war and went to work for Deacon Distributing Company in Reno. In 1965 he became the tax assessor of Storey County, a position which he held until 1978, when he initially retired. Jack Flanagan is again working in the mining industry; he is employed by the United Mining Corporation.

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LIFE AND STRUCTURES ON THE COMSTOCK**

PREPARED FOR THE STOREY COUNTY, NEVADA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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An Oral History Conducted by Ann Harvey
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University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim

as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text.

a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

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INTRODUCTION

Jack Flanagan, a third generation Comstocker, was born in Virginia City, Nevada, on 5 April 1910. His grandparents, who emigrated to the Comstock at the height of its nineteenth century mining boom, were among the men and women who built Virginia City. One grandfather was a railroad man; the other was a hard rock miner. The first was killed in a railroad accident at Medicine Bow, Wyoming; the other died of silicosis contracted in the Yellow Jacket mine. Their wives, undaunted by these tragedies, went on to raise large families. From these families emerged Jack Flanagan's mother and father, who also participated in the life of the Comstock Lode. In his oral history Jack Flanagan recounts the story of his family. Their story parallels the story of the Comstock Lode.

But the history of the lode did not end with its second generation. Mining continued in Virginia City, and Jack Flanagan was, himself, a hard rock miner working in the Hale & Norcross tunnel during the 1930s. In his oral history Mr. Flanagan reminisces

about his mining experiences. He also takes the reader on a fascinating tour of the Hale & Norcross mine.

Mining on the lode, however, did temporarily abate with the outbreak of the Second World War. Gold and silver were declared non-strategic metals, and the mines on the Comstock were closed. Although he left the Comstock during the war, Jack Flanagan returned home after the war and went to work for Deacon Distributing Company in Reno. In 1965 he became the tax assessor of Storey County, a position which he held until 1978 when he temporarily retired. Today, Jack Flanagan is again working in the mining industry; he is currently employed by the United Mining Corporation, and he still lives in Virginia City, Nevada, with his charming wife, Lorna.



JACK FLANAGAN
1984

AN INTERVIEW WITH JACK FLANAGAN

Jack Flanagan: My name is Jack A. Flanagan. I was born on the corner of Mill and North C streets in Virginia City, 5 April 1910. My father's name was John B. Flanagan, and Bertha L. Eddy was my mother's name. I was delivered by Dr. Toogood; I was his first delivery. I have one sister who is now living in Sparks. Her name is Edra Reiher.

Ann Harvey: When did your grandfather come to Virginia City?

Barney Flanagan came out here with his brother, Jim, on the completion of the V & T [Virginia & Truckee] Railroad, prior to 1880; they both worked on the V & T Railroad.

The V & T was completed in 1869, so it was about that time?

About that time. [My grandfather] was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and moved up to Cincinnati, Ohio, when he was 15 years old. In Ohio he worked on the B & O [Baltimore & Ohio] Railroad as a fireman. Then from Ohio

he moved out to Virginia City at the request of his brother to become an engineer on the V & T Railroad. He was 18 years old at the time.

When you were growing up was the V & T still operating?

Yes, it was.

Could you describe the route of the V & T?

The V & T ran from Virginia City to Carson City and then on to Reno. There it would connect with the Southern Pacific lines to bring freight back to Virginia City.

At one time there were 52 trains in and out of Virginia City, and these were not all passenger trains. Some were ore trains hauling the ore from Virginia City down to the Carson River where many of the mills were located. They would haul the ore down to where a big chain crossed the river. Wood cut up above Gardnerville was floated down the Carson River [to this location]. It was then picked up,

put into the cars and hauled back to Virginia City to run the steam engines in Virginia City. At one point there was more horsepower created in Virginia City than in any other spot in the whole world.

Was your grandfather married when he arrived in Virginia City?

No. He did eventually marry, and his wife was Annie Crevey. Her father, Daniel Crevey, was born in Ireland, and came to the United States. Annie was from the East and moved out to stay with relatives in San Francisco when she was 20 years old. Then she and her sister, Mary Blake, left San Francisco and moved to Virginia City where she and my grandfather met and were married. Annie had another sister, Liza Nelson, who lived in San Francisco.

Did she work outside the home after she married your grandfather?

I don't think so. She was busy raising a big family. They had 10 children: Bernard, Sadie, Mamie, Katie, Dave, Jack, Willie, Margie, Gertrude and Florence. They lost several of their children in a diphtheria epidemic. They are buried in the Catholic cemetery in Virginia City. Marge died in the second grade when they moved to Victor [Colorado]. The children that were left were Mamie, Katie, Dave, Jack— my father—and Gertrude.

My grandfather followed his brother Jim to Victor, Colorado. That was a booming town then [since] they had just struck a good gold ledge there, and there was a need for engineers on the trains. My grandfather Flanagan moved to Victor to work on the trains, and he was deadheading a ride back in the caboose from one of his runs and collided with the back end of another train.

He was killed. This was at Medicine Bow [Wyoming].

That left Annie Flanagan, his wife, here in Virginia City, and she had no way of taking care of herself and the children. So in 1898 Jim Flanagan moved the family back to Victor, Colorado. That was where Annie stayed and raised her children.

When did your mother's father move to Virginia City?

William Eddy [my grandfather] moved here prior to 1880 as did my grandmother, Mary Eddy. I don't know exactly where they came from—how they happened to come here has been lost. They were English. My grandmother was born as the boat docked in New York City. They had 5 children: Bertha, my mother; Mamie; Cora; George and Willie.

Then I was in the assessor's office going through the old books [I discovered] kind of a coincidence. Back in 1880 both Mr. Eddy's and Mr. Flanagan's names appeared on the Storey County assessment roll for the first time. That was kind of eerie—they both bought homes in the same year in Virginia City. It seems like kind of a pattern was laid out for this unusual thing to happen, for 2 people from different parts of the world to come here and both buy homes. I happened to be the offspring of this deal. [laughter]

Do you remember the names of the mines your grand father Eddy worked in?

He worked in the Crown Point and also in the Yellow Jacket mines. He died when he was 33 years old from the dust of the silica in the currents of the Yellow Jacket mine in Gold Hill. It was a lung problem. Here in Virginia City when people developed this they said

they had “rocks in the box.” It was in the chest. The lungs filled up with dust. When you go through the old cemetery in Gold Hill it is surprising to see how many of these men were in their twenties and thirties and died due to the silica in the Yellow Jacket mine. They didn’t know what was doing it at the time. They would work in the mines, develop this, and pretty soon it shut their air off. That was their finish. It was a shame.

What did your grandmother Eddy do after your grandfather passed away?

She was left with all these kiddies, and the only thing she could do was take in washing for the county hospital in Virginia City. She would walk from Gold Hill up to Virginia City, pick up the dirty clothes and sheets from the hospital, carry them to Gold Hill and wash them. Then she would carry the clean linens back to the hospital again. By doing this she was able to keep her family at home and take care of them.

Little by little she saved enough money to get into a little business for herself in Virginia City. She rented a store in the center part of town and did millinery work. Eventually she was able to purchase a store on the south end of C Street. She made that larger [and sold both] millinery and yardage goods. She used to make little skull caps for the miners. They were just light cotton, but they wore them to keep the hair out of their eyes and also to absorb some of the perspiration. She had a small candy counter in the store; she would catch the kiddies [going] to and from school and sell them penny bars of candy. They could come in with a nickel and get quite an assortment of candy. It is a little different nowadays. A nickel wouldn’t even buy you the outside wrapper on a piece of candy. She was a very remarkable little woman, and I

think she deserves a lot of credit for what she did.

I think so, too. It is not easy to raise 5 children on your own. Do you remember the name of your grandmother’s store?

Just Mrs. Eddy’s.

Could you describe the store?

It was a narrow building about 35 feet wide, but it was deep. It ran about 75 feet deep and had shelves on both sides and an aisle down through the center. Her working counter was toward the rear of the store. She did her work there [and made] the things that she produced to sell in the store. The store got dark late in the afternoon because the sun would set in the west. There were no windows in the back of the building because it was set into the side of the mountain. In the morning there was a lot of sun because the big windows in the front of the store let in a lot of light.

What did she use to light the back of the store?

I’m pretty sure that in 1906* the first electricity was [used] in Virginia City, so the store was electrically lit.

Were there buildings on either side of Mrs. Eddy’s store?

*Electricity was first used on the Comstock in 1899 when the Comstock Pumping Association contracted with the Truckee River General Electric Company to have electricity furnished to the mines. From: Slosson, H. L. *Deep Mining on the Comstock*. San Francisco: [H. L. Slosson, 1910].

To the south was Theresa Rodham's millinery store and to the north was the Tahoe House—a hotel and restaurant.

Can you describe these structures?

Well, the millinery store was in comparison with Mrs. Eddy's store. The Tahoe House had a frontage on the main street of approximately 75 to 80 feet. It had a staircase going up to the rooms upstairs, and the restaurant was set on the main floor. The tables were out in the floor part of the restaurant and the kitchen was to the rear. A lot of miners lived in rooms upstairs, and they boarded at the restaurant. That kept everybody happy. [laughter]

Did Grandmother Eddy ever tell you stories about the Indians, the Chinese or some other ethnic group in the early days of Virginia City?

No. Well, there were a lot of Indians living here at that time. The Chinese population dwindled after the railroad was in. A few of the Chinese that were left had little stores, and others were in the laundry business. The Indians did odd jobs. I don't recall ever hearing of any time when the Indians or the Chinese worked in the mines; the Indians and the Chinese never worked in the mines. Most of the first miners were from England, Cornwall and Ireland. Then later on the miners came in from the southern part of Europe—the Italians. But at the beginning it was all Welsh, Irish and English that were working in the mines.

You are actually descended from one of the early English miners?

Irish and English, a combination.

Do you remember from looking at the courthouse records where the Eddy and the

Flanagan homes were located when your grandparents lived here?

The Flanagan home was by the V & T roundhouse. The Eddy home was in Gold Hill on Bowers Grade. I lived in that at one time.

Do you remember what it looked like?

It was a pleasant house. There must have been 6 or 7 rooms in the house. It was a white house with a front porch and a small yard. It looked right over the Crown Point Ravine which dropped down approximately 400 feet. Across from the Crown Point Ravine was the V & T trestle where the train came through into Gold Hill and on up to Virginia City.

Could you describe the Crown Point trestle?

It was a massive wood structure approximately 300 feet off of the valley floor. It was probably about 600 feet long.

Do you remember when it was torn down?

Yes. That was around 1935. [I remember] because I was planning on building a house at the time. I went down to the gentleman that was tearing down the trestle, and I purchased three 8-by-16-inch timbers 33 feet long, which I hauled to Virginia City, and [on which] I eventually constructed my house. That made the foundation of my house. Right now we are sitting on the timbers of the old Crown Point trestle.

Could you tell me our location at the moment?

The southwest corner of A and Taylor streets.

Did other mining families live near the Crown Point Ravine?

Yes. Down Bowers Grade there were numerous houses, and down in the Crown Point Ravine there were a lot of houses. I was pretty small at the time, but I do remember the family that lived next door. That was the Marks family.

Is this the Marks family that later purchased the crystal Bar in Virginia City?

That is correct. Sandy Bowers's mine was in upper Gold Hill. Its ore was hauled from there down to a road that was behind the Gold Hill depot. Then it went up a grade [approximately] 300 feet above the Crown Point valley floor and over to the end of the canyon where there was flowing water. Sandy Bowers's mill was located here for processing the ore from the mine.

Where was your father born and what was his full name?

My dad was born in Virginia City, and his full name was John Bernard Flanagan. He moved to Victor, Colorado, with his mother, Annie Flanagan, and he grew up there. [He went to school] in Victor, Colorado. I'm pretty sure he went through high school. Then, around 1908, he came back to Virginia City to work in the mines. He met my mother in Virginia City, and they were married here.

Do you know the names of the mines your father worked at?

No. I have no idea which ones he was working then. He never mentioned it. You see, sometimes miners stayed a long time at one mine, and at other times they moved

around. They would work here for a while; then they would take off and go down to work in the mines in Tonopah. [When] they would get tired of that they would come back here and work the mines in Virginia City. [Then] they would get tired of that and go on up to Butte, Montana. Pretty soon you would see them back here in Virginia City again. They had a circuit that they worked back and forth between those 3 towns. They gave them the name "tramp miners."

That's an interesting combination: Butte, Tonopah and Virginia City. That was quite a triangle they were covering.

Like the story says: the young boy was leaving Ireland, and his mother said, "Don't stop in the United States. Go right on through to the boot." [laughter]

When your dad was working in the mines in Virginia City did he belong to the Miners' Union?

He probably did. They were a very strong union. I don't know what the wage scale was prior, but when the Miners' Union was formed they brought the wage scale to \$4 a day. In comparison to nowadays that was nothing. But back in those days, \$4 a day was a pretty good little piece of money to be bringing home.

Did the Miners' Union have a hail here in Virginia City?

They did, and the building is still standing in very good condition. It is located on B Street just north of Union Street. That is on the left-hand side as you go north. It is a large building. It has a frontage of about 60 feet and a depth of about 75 feet. It is a 2-story building

with a large hall downstairs where they held dances and banquets. In the upper part of the building were offices and meeting rooms for the miners and the union officials.

Did the miners have a library in the union hall?

I'm pretty sure they did. Eventually the Bureau of Mines got the material that was in there.

At one point in the early twentieth century our research indicates there was actually a mining college in Virginia City. Do you know anything about that?

I'm not too familiar with it, but it was started, and they taught mining, assaying and other things connected with mining. That was also started in this same building, but when it grew smaller they had a small building on C Street next to the Wells Fargo offices and the Hotel Virginia.

Do you remember what it looked like?

That was a small white building with a frontage of about 45 feet and a depth of about 70 feet. It was one story on the C Street side and 3 stories on the D Street side. It seems kind of funny to tell a person that, but [Virginia City] is built on the side of a mountain; all the buildings on one side would be 1 or 2 stories, but when you got on the street below there would be 4 or 5 stories.

Do you know if many of the miners went to the mining college?

I have no idea on that. There must have been quite an attendance because it lasted for years.

It began around 1903. Do you know when it ended?

I don't know, roughly to 1925 or 1928.

When your father was a miner in Virginia City around 1909 were there many holidays the miners liked to celebrate?

I think probably Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's and the Fourth of July.

On the Fourth of July were there parades?

Yes. They always had large parades, and the different military guards—as they called them here at the time— would always be out in full parade. They had their bands and horse-drawn floats. One year my mother told me they put out red, white and blue bunting above the stores in Virginia City, and everybody was all decorated and had their flags out. Then the morning of the Fourth of July here came a snowstorm! [laughter] It just lasted for a short time, but the colors ran, and the whole street was red and white and blue. They turned out for their parade, though!

Do you remember the names of any of the guards that marched in the parade?

Oh, there was the Emmet Guard and I presume the National Guard. That's all I recall right now.

Did they play games on the Fourth of July?

They did in those days: baseball, horseshoe pitching and picnics.

Did your father always work in the mines?

No. He left Virginia City and worked in the oil fields up in Wyoming. He put in a good many years back there in Wyoming. [He also worked] in Victor and Leadville, Colorado. Then about 1937 he came back to Virginia City.

Did he retire when he came back to Virginia City?

No. He ran a hoist in the mines here in Virginia City. He was a hoist engineer besides being a miner. His last job [here] was as a hoist engineer at the New York mine in Gold Hill. He worked there until they closed it down at the start of World War II. From there he went out to Yerington and ran hoists for the Anaconda Copper Company. I think copper slowed down after the war was over, so he moved to Dayton, Nevada, and became a guard at the state prison in Carson City. He was a guard there when he passed away.

He had quite a busy life!

He was certainly on the move a lot! [laughter]

I have just one more question to ask about miners during your dad's time. Was there any place in Virginia City where miners liked to socialize with one another?

I think at one time there were 40 bars, so they had a lot of places to meet all right. Three churches and 40 bars! [laughter]

Well, at least they had a clear perspective on their values here! [laughter]

Why don't we talk about your mother now. Where was your mother born?

My mother was born in Gold Hill, Nevada. She graduated from Gold Hill High School, and then she went out to northeastern Nevada and taught school for 3 years.

Did you ever see the high school your mother went to in Gold Hill, and could you describe it?

Yes, I did. It was still standing when I was a youngster. It was a large building. I would say it probably had a 200-foot frontage and a depth of 60 feet. It was a 2-story structure built of stone. It was a combination of grammar school and high school. The school sat just below the Crown Point mine and a little off of the main road between Virginia City and Silver City. All that is left now is a large stone retaining wall built up where the school was located.

What did your mom do when she moved back to Virginia City from northeastern Nevada?

I think she got married. She met my dad around 1909.

While you were growing up your mother did household chores. Do you remember any of those?

There was the old washtub they had to run by hand and the wringer which was also run by hand. [She did] the regular household duties and cooked on the wood or coal stove. When I was a youngster it was always kind of a happy time when she baked bread. Sometimes she would save out some of the bread dough instead of putting it all in the oven, [and] make little patties out of it and fry it in a deep grease on top of the stove. These were delicious to eat while they were hot with jelly on them.

Did your mom make your dad lunch when he went to work in the mines?

Yes.

Do you remember what she put in his lunches?

There would usually be various meats, sandwiches, fruit and cake or pie. If there was a banquet where a lot of people gathered and had food, why, when the banquet was over the women would pick up the pieces of [leftover] food. They would take that home to make the lunch for their husbands the next morning. This got to be an old saying in Virginia City, “We’ll take home a little for the bucket.”

I’ve not heard that before. Your mother was a housewife most of her life?

That’s right.

Where was the Flanagan home located?

Well, they never purchased a home. They always rented and moved from one house to another in different locations of town. In later years my mother purchased the house that sits directly behind my house—on the corner of Howard and Taylor streets. That was where I grew up.

Could you describe that house?

It is a 2-story house built on a huge stone bulkhead. The house is probably 40 feet wide and about 75 feet long. It consists of 3 bedrooms upstairs, a dining room, kitchen and living room.

What was the religious preference of your mother and father?

My mother was baptized a Baptist and my father was baptized a Catholic. The Baptist church was on the main street in Gold Hill, Nevada.... There could have been one here in Virginia City. I’m not too sure. Now there are Catholic, Presbyterian and Episcopalian [churches here], but there could have been a Baptist church. I don’t recall.

Does the main street of Gold Hill have a name?

Main Street. It is an extension of C Street. C Street [runs by] the Fourth Ward School up to the very top of the hill—that was the division line between Virginia City and Gold Hill. Then C Street becomes Main Street for Gold Hill. This Main Street runs on down through Gold Hill and into Silver City.

Where did your mother buy your clothes when you were growing up in Virginia City?

Ryan and Stenson was a clothing store in Virginia City. It was on the right-hand side of the main street. It was located in the lower part of the Ryan building. Emmett Dwyer [also] had a clothing store on the corner of C and Taylor streets.

Do you remember what either of these stores looked like?

Not too much. Dwyer’s store was narrow and deep. Stenson’s store was about 50 or 60 feet wide. It had clothes on the shelves and hanging on racks...and mirrors around so you could look to see how fine you were when you bought a suit.

What was the name of the grocery store where your mother shopped?

It was called N. C. Prater Company. That was located approximately 6 doors south of Ryan and Stenson's clothing store. It was also a narrow deep store. On the right-hand side of the store as you went in they had an elevator to hoist their provisions; storage was upstairs over the store. On the left-hand side were huge scales for weighing out large quantities of grain or potatoes. Right alongside of this there was a produce stand where fresh vegetables were brought into town. Then in the back hanging over the register they had the bananas. They were hung from the ceiling. They put the bananas back from the rest of the produce to keep the kids from swiping them!

They sold coffee pots and frying pans. In the store there were huge shelves reaching almost all the way to the ceiling. They were stocked with various types of food. You could also buy big pieces of codfish. They were hanging from the ceiling—many things hung from the ceiling—and they looked like tennis rackets hanging up there. You would take these home and soak them good, and that codfish would almost come back to life! You could have a good dinner with codfish and boiled potatoes.

They used to take a sprinkling can and go over the full length of the front of the store on the outside counter to quiet the dust while they were sweeping. But the law was not to put any water on the back part of the counter. [This was] because after years and years of buying the sugar loose in bags it had accumulated on the floor behind the counter, and when anybody was cleaning it up it seemed like they always missed this. So it was probably about an inch deep, and when it got wet it became a real gummy mess. They went on year after year with this situation. It was a regular skating rink!

Where did your father get his hair cut in Virginia City?

The only barber I remember was Mr. Huddy. He had a shop on the east side of town on the corner of Union and C streets. When I was a little youngster I would go in there and see all these shaving mugs. They were all in separate little compartments on a large shelf on the side of the wall. Every man had his own name on his shaving mug. When they went there for a shave and a haircut the barber would pick out the special mug and would use the soap out of this to lather up their faces. They had swivel chairs they used to pump up by hand. A lot of times you would go in to get a haircut, and there would be gobs of hair on the floor. Eventually the barber would take time out and sweep it all over into the corner.

Were either of your parents involved in politics while you were growing up?

No.

What political party did they belong to?

My father was a Democrat. Up until around 1914... in that age anyway.. women weren't allowed to vote. When I was a small child this was brought up—I think I was a little boy around 4 or 5 years old. At this election I had a banner out there, and I was really excited—"Vote for the women! Vote for the women!" Then eventually my mother became a Republican. [laughter]

Were the people in Virginia City generally in favor of the women's right to vote?

I think they were mostly in favor.

Do you remember how Virginia City reacted to the First World War?

Well, from what I can recall they were very sad because it took a lot of the young men out of this town and into the army. Quite a number of them from this town were killed in the First World War. When the First World War was over they had quite a celebration. Eventually they brought some of the big tanks that were in the war out, and they had a parade of the old tanks and trucks. Eventually, one of the tanks from the war was purchased by Virginia City, and they used this as a tractor to pull the grader around to repair the streets. One time when I was about 16 years old I was working for the county, and I had the opportunity to run this old tank and to pull the grader. [laughter]

Well, we've been talking a little bit about your own reminiscences for a while, so why don't we get into your biography now. Why don't you tell me where you were born again?

I was born on the northeast corner of C and Mill Street in a big 2-story house. The folks were renting this, and the building was owned by a man by the name of Johnny Noce who also had a ranch out in the Chalk Hill district north of Virginia City. Back in those days he ran the ranch, and he also worked the chalk mines. This chalk was of high value, and they would haul the chalk in from the chalk hills. In those days they were using part of this chalk as a base for women's face powder.

What period was this again?

This would be around 1910, and they worked those chalk mines up till about 1926.

How far away from Virginia City were the chalk mines?

They were about 12 miles north of Virginia City on the road as you go to Reno, but you would turn off to the right and go down through Long Valley to the chalk mines.

He [Johnny Noce] contracted a lot of young Italian boys. He brought them right from Italy. They would sign a contract to work for so many years for Mr. Noce, and then they would become American citizens. In doing this he brought a lot of young Italians over to this country. They would have been unable to get here on their own. He contracted them for so many years of labor, and he took care of them during this time, and then they would be free to become American citizens. The story is told that all these young Italians he brought over [stayed at] his boardinghouse across the street from the green building I was born in. They say that at dinner time he would have everybody sit down, and he would say, "All right, all right. Pitch in you hogs. Pitch in! Pitch in!"

Where did you go to school?

Well, there were 2 schools at that time in Virginia City. There was the First Ward School in the north end of town and the Fourth Ward School at the south end of town. The division line was Union Street. If you were living north of Union Street you went to the First Ward School up through the third grade. If you were living south you went to the Fourth Ward School, and there you would go from first grade on through high school.

I started at the First Ward School. Then the family moved to the other side of Union Street, so I went to the Fourth Ward. Then the family moved back north of Union, and I went

back to the First Ward again—through the third grade. Then from the fourth grade on through high school I went to the old Fourth Ward School.

Do you remember what the First Ward School looked like?

It was a large building. It had 2 stories. At the time when I was going there, there was just one large room on the main floor. Mrs. Quirk was our schoolteacher. She taught the first, second and third grade all in the one room at the First Ward School.

Do you remember Mrs. Quirk?

She was a nice woman—tall and thin. She took a lot of time with the children and gave them a good foundation on the schooling.

Who were your teachers when you moved from the First Ward School to the Fourth Ward School?

Mollie Somers was a teacher in the Fourth Ward School. She had the first, second and third grades. In the fourth and fifth grades it was Sadie McQuarree. In the sixth and the seventh grades Marion McKenzie was our teacher. In the eighth grade the teacher was Arvilla Coffin. She was a real young teacher. I think this was her first teaching experience.

Could you describe the Fourth Ward School?

Yes. It is a real large building—probably 125 feet of frontage on C Street and a depth of about 65 feet. It was a 4-story building. They taught the first grade in the basement, and later on it was used for cooking classes. Then on the second floor was the third, fourth, fifth,

sixth and seventh grades. On the third story was the eighth grade and the high school. Two huge rooms were in the top story where they taught special classes that would come up.

One thing I remember about the old Fourth Ward School was its big potbellied stoves. These stoves were fired by coal. Each stove sat right in the center of the room, and everything was fine in the summertime. But in the wintertime they would get those old stoves all revved up, and sweat would be running off of the kids who sat by the stove, while the kids who sat by the window were freezing to death. At the time the old building was not insulated, and it you happened to have a seat by the windows it was a little breezy sitting there. But we seemed to manage and get through it all.

Who were your teachers in high school?

When I first went into high school George Dilworth, who eventually became the principal of Sparks High School, was there. There was also Gary Eden and Donald Richards, who became an attorney in Reno.

When you were in high school did the boys have athletics?

We were always great for basketball, and we had track teams, but we never entered into baseball or football.

Where did you practice basketball?

That was in the old National Guard Hall and also in Piper's Opera House. Back in those days we didn't have a gymnasium. We would use these 2 halls for practices. Gary Eden was a coach for one year, and another coach we had was John L. Metcalf.

What did the young men do in Virginia City as teenagers for entertainment?

We used to go on hikes and do a little horseback riding. There were no swimming facilities here, but the flume ended up in Byrne's ravine, and there was always a stream of water running down. So we kids built a dam across there and formed our own swimming hole. The water coming out of the flume was pretty cold, but we fixed that by taking up old washtubs that did not have holes in them, and we would build fires of sagebrush in them and then float them on the water. After waiting for about 20 minutes the chill was off of the water, and we were able to swim. The pond wasn't very deep, but we did a lot of practicing and mud crawling, and eventually we learned to swim. More kids learned to swim in that old swimming hole than you could shake a stick at. [laughter]

What did you do in the winter?

In wintertime back in those days they didn't have a lot of road equipment to remove the snow. That slowed down the automobile traffic, and many of these streets—like Taylor Street—[we could] sleigh on. Taylor Street was one of the main sleigh-riding tracks in town. We would gather on Howard Street and have a lookout on C Street, so somebody could watch [for traffic]. Then we would get on our sleds and go down Taylor Street, turn right behind the Catholic church for one block, turn to the left, and then on down Washington Street. This run was close to a mile, and we would be down there in less than 5 minutes. The hills were steep and the track was fast. Then it would take us another half an hour to walk up. So after about 3 rides you were ready to call it a day.

Then we had another deal. The mine dumps were real steep. So we built "Yankee jumpers"—they were like skis. These were built from the staves of a big 50-gallon barrel. We would pick out a barrel stave and then nail a 2-by-4-inch board onto the back end of the stave in an upright position. Then across the top of that you would nail on a small board which you sat on. So we would climb to the top of the mine dumps and ride down them by balancing on this one barrel stave. We would pile up snow on our track at various places, and when we hit the snow we would fly through the air and then light again down the hill. This was really exciting.

Were there many dances when you were growing up in Virginia City?

They held quite a number of dances. They always held the dances in the National Guard Hall which had a big, beautiful ballroom. The floor in the hall was unique because on top of the huge timbers [that supported the building] were railroad springs, and on top of these railroad springs were more timbers that the floor was anchored to. The floor did not actually touch the sides of the building. So when everybody was up there dancing the floor would move in a rigorous up-and-down motion keeping time with the music. It was a graceful and lovely place to dance.

Did you have live bands in those days?

We had our own little orchestras that played for the dances. Then in later years small bands came in from Reno. There was an Italian fellow, Tony Pecetti, who would strap his accordion on his back and ride his motorcycle up from Reno and play for dances.

You were a teenager during the 1920s. Do you remember any major events happening in that decade?

The mines were still working here in the 1920s, and a large company purchased the south end mines and the Gold Hill mines. These were all connected underground [to one another] and to American Flat. This company built a huge cyanide mill down at American Flat. They processed 2,000 tons of ore a day. The mill was built in 1922 and ran until 1928. I think it was stopped due to fluctuations in the price of silver. It was a wonderful operation. They worked the Hale & Norcross, the Savage, the Potosi and the Chollar in Virginia City. The ore was worked in these mines and then dropped down a long chute to the mines on the Gold Hill level. These mines consisted of the Crown Point, the Yellow Jacket and some smaller mines. This was then all hauled underground out to American Flat. The haulage was done by an electric motor underground. The motor pulled 10 ten-ton ore cars each trip. When the ore train came through the portal of the tunnel it would be going at a high rate of speed because it had to go up a platform about 250 feet high. [From the platform] the ore was dumped into the ore bins and then was processed through the mill. It had to go through the crushers, grinders and eventually through to the cyanide tanks. The cyanide dissolved the gold and silver into liquid form. Then it was put through zinc boxes that caused the cyanide to drop the gold and silver into precipitates. These were then melted down in a huge furnace, and the actual gold and silver came out in large bars of bullion. These bars were then shipped to the various mints in the United States.

Were there any other major events in Virginia City in the 1920s that you can recall?

There were various mines working in Virginia City at that time. There was the Ophir mine, the C & C mine and the Union mine. All of these were connected together underground. In fact, you could go down the Union shaft in the north part of town and travel underground clear down through Gold Hill and out the tunnel to American Flat. This is a distance of about 4 miles—all underground and everything connected. Or, you could leave the main haulage tunnel between the various mines and [travel] in an easterly direction through the Sutro tunnel, and you would eventually come out near the Carson River. They estimate there were nearly 600 miles of underground workings at Virginia City. Now this consists of tunnels, drifts, cross-cuts, raises, slopes, inclines, declines and shafts which makes it a pretty well undermined town. When we have a good earthquake here—instead of getting a second and awful jar like every place else—we will just wiggle like we were sitting on a bowl full of jello.

Why don't we talk now about some of your occupational experiences? Did you work during high school?

Well, I held various jobs around town, and one summer I put in the vacation on working on a ranch down in the Washoe Valley.

Do you remember the name of the ranch?

It was Sauers' s ranch right next door to Bowers Mansion in the Washoe Valley. There were odd jobs we kids could do there. When I graduated from high school I moved to Reno

and went to work for Scott Motors. I worked for Scott Motors until the end of 1931 when the Depression started to creep out to the western part of the United States. Then things began to tighten up, and we moved back to Virginia City. We had to make a go of it, and we finally did.

In 1932 the Arizona Comstock Corporation moved into Virginia City, and they opened up the Hale & Norcross mine again and built a cyanide mill down in the canyon. The miners were put to work again, and this time we worked the Hale & Norcross, the Savage, the Chollar and the Potosi. This mine employed about 65 miners and a full crew at the mill. It was quite a lifesaver for Virginia City during the Depression. We worked in this area from 1932 on up through about 1937 or 1938 when the mine eventually closed down.

Do you remember the name of the canyon that the cyanide plant was in?

It was just over the hill from the Hale & Norcross mine. They started an open pit at this mine—which is directly across from the Fourth Ward School—and they were flourishing. They finally ran into difficulties because the ore dipped into the mountain for the first 300 feet here in Virginia, but then it turns and runs off out to the east. The dip into the mountain caused a slide due to the overburden coming down. Eventually they had to move 10 tons to produce one ton. It became too costly to move the waste in order to get at the ore. So that closed down the Hale & Norcross mine.

Before we go on perhaps we could talk about the Comstock Lode. It runs from north to south, doesn't it?

The lode starts out just a little before the Union mine and then runs south clear down to the Gold Hill mines. There are some small branches off of the main lode, but it runs north of the union mine and south of the Crown Point mine in Gold Hill. Now this ledge dips. It starts to the surface and then dips into the mountain on an angle to the west. At approximately the 300-foot level the ledge turns over and runs on out to the east.

In the Big Bonanza, [which] was hit in the C & C mine, the ledge was 300 feet wide. This was the first time that miners ever ran into a ledge so large. It was a problem to work due to the overburden above the miners. So a German fellow by the name of Deidesheimer invented the square-set stope. These were timbers that interlocked. They had bonanzas in the rest of the mines, but nothing like at the C & C mine.

In his History of the Big Bonanza Dan De Quille took his readers on a tour of a mine. I would like you take us on a tour of one of the mines you worked in. Which mine would you like to talk about?

Well, I put in the most time at the Hale & Norcross mine.

OK. Let's talk about that then.

The Hale & Norcross tunnel started on what we used to call F Street in Virginia City. It went west into the mountain approximately 500 feet to a huge shaft going down. Here they had a large room for an underground hoist to sit in, and the cages which took people, and the ore cars up and down the shaft. In the early days this tunnel ran from beyond this point in a westerly direction 700 feet beyond a vertical line drawn from the flag pole on the

top of Mount Davidson. This huge tunnel was put in to see if there was another vein on the western side of the mountain, but eventually they [found] there was no ore beyond the Comstock Lode.

What would you see as you approached the Hale & Norcross mine from the outside?

At that time you would have seen a large portal made of timber, painted white with Arizona Comstock or Hale & Norcross over the front. Going through this portal would be tracks, and in order to get into the mine you would have to walk between the tracks. The tracks were put in to haul the ore cars or the waste cars, whichever. You would walk between these tracks into the big shaft we just discussed. Then you would get on a cage, and they would signal the engineer to let you down to the various levels of the mine.

Was this the hoisting equipment?

Yes, it is.

Could you describe it for us?

The hoisting equipment was a huge machine with large drums on it run by an electric motor. The engineer controlled its speed and also its brakes. The brakes were on big drums. When the engineer let you down the shaft he would use the brakes. If you wanted to go to the first level, he would let you down to there. You could then get off the cage and tour through the rest of the mine where the miners were working.

If you were on the first level you would be facing south when you got off of the cage. You would then travel in a southerly direction, and as you walked along you would see the

various raises. Now these raises were where you went up to where the ore body was. They went up above your head in a vertical direction. They would always work below the vein and raise on it. When you set off your blast to blast out the ore, the ore would come in a downward direction and into a chute. That saved a lot of hand shoveling. When you hit a vein you would always work up on it. If there was a good vein going in a downward position you would sink another tunnel from the main shaft and go in on that level and then raise on this vein that you had hit from the upper level. It was faster working that way, and all the ore was automatically forced into the chute. From the chute it was loaded into ore cars and then moved out to the station where the cage stopped. The ore cars were loaded on the cage and pulled to the surface—or in this particular mine back up to the hoist level. From there it was hauled out through the tunnel that we entered from on F Street and on into the mill.

If we were traveling on the 365 level we would finally connect with the Chollar mine. Here the same mining operations were going on. From there you could go on over to the Potosi mine—everything was connected underground. There was always fresh air because at various points in the levels they would make a raise to the surface for air. When that was impossible huge pipes carried air from the surface; the air was forced by fans underground so the miners would have fresh air to breathe.

Now that we are underground perhaps you would define a few terms for us. What is a winze?

A winze is when you're underground and you sink a hole deeper. If you start from the

surface and go down then you have what is called a shaft. When you are sinking a shaft you go down. If you want to go in a horizontal direction you make a cross-cut or a tunnel. A tunnel can be cut whichever direction you decide to go. If you decide there is an ore body underneath you then you sink a winze, which is the same as a shaft only it is sunk underground and not from the surface.

What is a drift?

A drift is where you hit an ore body, and you follow the ore body along. That is called a drift. A cross-cut is where you're following a drift, and you turn in a righthand direction or in a left-hand direction. This is called a cross-cut because it cuts across the vein that you are following. It gives you the depth and the width of the vein. Then you can figure out the best way to take this body of ore out and still hold the ground above you so that there are no cave-ins.

What is country rock?

Country rock is surface rock or waste material.

How does the ore get out of the tunnel?

It all depends on the size of the mine. In the Hale & Norcross mine it was hoisted up the shaft from the various levels to the level where the hoist sat. They hoisted the ore up in individual cars; each held one ton of ore. These were then coupled together and pulled by an electric motor out through the tunnel and across to the ore bin at the cyanide mill where it was dumped into the mill. It then went through the crusher and was processed.

Was the ore moved along tracks in these tunnels?

Yes. It was [moved along] small rail tracks.

Who put those tracks in?

The miners had to put the tracks in. When you are setting a track you use spikes identical to the spikes on a railroad rail, but these spikes are much smaller. When you were hammering a spike into the tie and the head of it touched the rail, you would not hit the last blow. There was a reason for this: if the head of the spike would hit the bottom of the rail and you hit one more blow, that would give the spike a chance to loosen. Then eventually with the cars running it, the spike would soon fall out, and your rails would come apart. Then you would have trouble with your ore cars. So we had the saying, "Don't hit the last blow when driving spikes into rails underground."

Now we talked about going up and down the mine in a cage. Could you describe one of these cages to us?

Let's start from the top of the cage. The top of the cage had a huge eye bolted on it where the cable was hooked onto the cage. There was also a big spring up there that took out some of the jar when the cage was in motion or stopping and starting. There was a small iron top on the cage; it looked like the roof of a house. This was because the shafts were often wet, and the roof permitted the water to run off. The platforms that you stood on were approximately 4 square feet. Up above your shoulder there was an iron bar that went across. When you stepped on the cage and they closed the gate, you would hold on to this iron bar to keep your balance in the cage.

When the big mines were running in Virginia City they used what they called double and triple-deck cages—either 2 or 3 cages, one under the other. The company lost a lot of time on the change of shifts, so when the miners were dropped down they were dropped so fast their feet would come off of the floor of the cage. [That was why] the bar was in the cage. It was something for the miners to hold on to. Also, the cables without much stress on them would stretch out and back up, bobbing the cage. The bar was a necessity when changing shifts. The cage would take men up out of the shaft who had put in their work and take down the new miners coming on to work. That was the cause of all this speed in hoisting and lowering the men. It took quite a little bit of time, and time was precious to the mine owners.

What did the cables that lowered and raised the cage look like?

The first cables they used were flat cables approximately 5 inches across and three-quarters of an inch thick. They were braided wire, and most of them were made right here on the Comstock.

Where were they made?

At the mines. They had a regular shop where they made the cable. For these first cables—the flat cables—the drum on the hoist was a huge spoked affair. Each time the cable went around the drum on the hoist it gained three-quarters of an inch. So [as the cage] came up, the faster the hoist was going the larger the drum would be developed by the cable going around the hoist. Approximately 500 feet below the surface they would shut the steam off, and the cages would

counterbalance. If one cage was going down and one cage coming up at the same time, they could shut the steam off, and the cage would come right on up to the surface.

Was there anything used to coat the cables in the mines?

Yes. They used tar on the cables because the mines were wet. Then they switched over to the rope-type cable. These were round cables probably an inch and a half to an inch and three-quarters thick. This ran on the drum of the hoist. It would wind back and forth across the drum as the cage went up, or it would unwind as the cage went down.

Was there anything besides the cages that moved up and down the shaft?

No. In the big mines there were 2-compartment shafts, and this is [what allowed them] to counterbalance the cages. When one cage was going up the other cage would be going down. Then there was a third compartment in the shaft, and that was where the water lines and air lines were put down into the shaft.

Why was a water line put into the shaft?

When the mines first started it was all hand drilling, and there was no need for water then. But when they found out the dust was killing the men they ran water down into the mines to wet down the mines. Also the water was used to run the jackhammers and the stopers. The jackhammer ran by compressed air, and the water went through the machine and into the head of the hole to keep the dust down. It also would wash out the particles of rock that the jackhammer was cutting.

This is interesting because when you were mining they were putting water down into the mines, but originally one of the major problems was getting water out of the mine.

That is correct. There was a huge amount of water running under Virginia City, and they first had to use what they called “Cornish pumps” to get the water out of the mines. The Cornish pumps were huge 12-by-12-inch timbers all bolted together. These were connected to a huge piece of machinery on the surface that turned. As the machine arm turned it moved the timbers in an up-and-down stroke. The timbers were counterbalanced, and a big dipper would hold the water and dump it into a trough. The timber would raise these big dippers back and forth, and these big dippers would dip into the water, raise it up to the next level and then dump the water into this trough. The next time they would go down, the dipper of the one above would pick up the water from this trough and raise it to another until the water was finally raised to the surface. This was a costly operation. So when the Sutro tunnel was put in—it came into the mines at the 1,600-foot level—the water was drained off through it instead of being raised to the surface.

We were talking at one point about the mines making their own cable for their cages. Although this occupation was essential to mining it is not actually defined as mining per se. Were there other occupations that were included in the mining process that did not actually entail the extraction of the ore?

Well, there were various occupations. The blacksmith was a very important man. The blacksmith shop was on the surface, and the blacksmith made various pieces of machinery

[for the mines]. He would also sharpen the picks and the other steel [tools] used in the mine. The blacksmith shop of the Hale & Norcross mine was located on the surface beyond the portal of the tunnel.

Were all of the upper works located in one building, or were there several buildings?

[That depends on the mine.] The C & C mine was one huge building because it had a vertical shaft. In this one building there were the hoistworks, the carpenter shop, the blacksmith shop, the change room and the place where they built and repaired the cables. At the Hale & Norcross [several buildings] were on the surface outside the portal of the tunnel. Therefore, if you wanted to take anything underground from the buildings on the surface you would go through the tunnel into the main shaft.

Did the Hale & Norcross have a carpentry shop?

Yes, it did. The carpenter’s shop was necessary. When you were running a drift or a cross-cut and you would get out of hard rock, you would have to timber to hold the surface ground above you. Also when making a stope you needed to use a lot of timber.

Did the Hale & Norcross have an assay office?

Yes. The assay office was located down at the mill site, where the cyanide mill was. Every large mine always had its own assay office to tell the value of the ore. They wanted to just take out what was [profitable] to mine and leave the rest for waste material.

Did the Hale & Norcross have a change room for the men?

Yes.

What is a change room?

A change room is a large building where the miners take off their street clothes and put on their digging clothes. These consist of overalls, shirts and rough shoes. In the change room there are long benches for the men to sit on while they put on their work clothes. Above these benches they keep their digging clothes. When they come off of work they take off their digging clothes and take hot water showers. When they get all washed and polished they get back into their street clothes and go home or uptown.

During the early period of the Comstock steam was a major source of power in the mines; however, in your time wasn't electricity the main source of power in the mines?

That is correct. When they first discovered the lode electricity wasn't around and steam power was. At this point all the mines on the Comstock were working, and all the steam engines and equipment were running. But steam power took a lot of extra work. You had to haul the cordwood into town and then put it into the furnace to keep your steam up. Then electricity came into town. This was roughly around 1896*. Electricity and electric motors eliminated a lot of work and made it easier for everybody.

In the early days of the Comstock the steam engines must have been very hot if they were down in the mines. Did the miners find a way of getting around that problem?

Most of the steam engines were on the surface, and they were used to run the hoists. But I presume the mines were hot enough

with the steam down there. On the 1,600-foot level of the C & C shaft there was a place where the miners used to come out and cool off. Three of the boys got together and brought down 3 turkey eggs. They set the 3 turkey eggs on the bench where the miners sat to cool off. Each of the 3 miners were on different shifts, and on each shift one would turn the eggs over. After a certain period of time the turkeys hatched out—in the place where the men were supposed to be cooling off!

The hottest mine was the Ward shaft. The temperature there that the miners worked in was 180 degrees. At this mine they worked 4 men in a crew, so 2 or 3 could rest and one could work or whatever. Working under this terrific heat just took it right out of them [even though] they worked 4 men in a crew, while in the other mines they worked 2 miners in a crew. This was south of town close to the V & T Railroad. This mine was a non-producer, but while they worked there it was the hottest place on the whole Comstock Lode.

What is giant powder?

Giant powder is stick powder made by the Giant Explosive Company. This stick of powder is probably three-quarters of an inch around and about 8 inches long. The powder was wrapped in oiled paper, and it was the powder they used in blasting underground.

*Electricity was first used on the Comstock in 1899 when the Comstock Pumping Association contracted with the Truckee River General Electric Company to have electricity furnished to the mines. From: Slosson, H. L. *Deep Mining on the Comstock*. San Francisco: [H. L. Slosson, 1910].

When was the powder used?

It was used when you were working the face of a tunnel and you ran into hard rock. To get through the hard rock you would usually put 6 holes into the face of the tunnel. Two holes would be above your head; 2 more holes were put in at a dipping angle just above your waist; and then 2 more holes were put in in the lower part of the face as “lifters.” Then you would load the holes with giant powder and cut your fuses in various lengths. Fuses burn about a foot a minute. Naturally you would cut your fuses long enough to have plenty of time to get out of the road when the explosion started. You would cut the 2 center holes quite short, so they would go off first and make a cut into the tunnel face. The 2 holes on the top would be cut just a little longer, and your 2 bottom holes or lifters would be the full length of your start fuses. You started with the center holes—the cut holes. These would cut out the face of the tunnel. Then the 2 top holes would come down and blast out the top. Finally the lifters, which were loaded with a little heavier powder, would raise the whole thing and push it back from the face of the tunnel.

How far apart were the levels in the Hale & Norcross?

Well, in the Hale & Norcross—from the main tunnel going in—the first level was the 365 level. Then you went down to the 420 level. The next level was the 580 level and then the 640 level. They [did not] measure right out at 100 feet or 50 feet. It all depended on the type of ground that they were working. If it looked like it was coming in for an ore body, then the miners would start a drift of f from that level.

Now there were vertical shafts and also what they called incline shafts. The incline shaft was tipped down. It would usually follow

down a vein, and it would be an angle shaft instead of a regular shaft—which is vertical. To move the ore down this shaft they used what they called a “skip.” A skip was different from the cage used on a vertical shaft. A skip ran on rails and had wheels on it. It attached to the bottom of the incline shaft. The skips were huge and looked like a long box. They were made out of steel and were attached by a cable to a hoist. The ore was dumped into the skip, and then the skip was pulled to the surface. Then the skip would dump the ore into an ore bin on the surface. From there it was picked up by wagons and hauled to the mill. The skip was a lot faster to work with than the cars in the vertical shaft because it took time to put the cars on and to take them off. Also the ore cars used were one-ton cars, but the skips were larger and could hold 2 to 3 tons of ore at one time. Therefore, it was quite a timesaver.

Was mining a dangerous occupation on the Comstock?

Yes, it was. This was the gruesome part of things that happened in the mines. There were various problems. A lot of times accidents—falling down the shaft, cave-ins in the mines and fire—took a good many lives.

In the early days the fire hazard was quite bad. They used candles, and a lot of times somebody would forget and leave a candle burning, and it would get onto the timbers and start a fire. This caused a lot of deaths in the mines.

One big fire in the Yellow Jacket mine took a good many of the miners that were there. They were trapped, could not get out, and there was no way of putting the fire out. It took some time before the fire was extinguished, and then the bodies were brought to the surface.

Then there were a few times that miners would be working in the mine and be killed by a missed hole.

What is a missed hole?

If you were drilling in a drift you might drill 6 holes, depending on the size of the drift, into its face. Then you would load them with dynamite. Well, sometimes only 5 of the holes would go off for some unknown reason—the cap wasn't a good one, or there was a break in the fuse and there would be one missed explosion. Then if the miners were not careful when they went back in the drift and began working with their bars and picks the missed hole could go off, and miners could be blasted to death. They were awful careful, but sometimes there would be a mishap.

Another situation that [cost lives involved] the station tenders. These were the men who took the empty car off of the cage and put the loaded car on the cage. Sometimes when the cars came out they would be moving them around getting them ready to put on the cage, and the car would get away from them and go down the shaft when the cage wasn't there. Often the man would go down with the cage. It's a strange thing to say, but this did happen.. .when a person fell down the shaft his shoes would come right off of his feet, but they would never be untied. This happened different times, and there was really no explanation for it.

Another little thing—not really a hazard but an annoyance—were the rats down in the mines. They were gray rats, and they were real bothersome. One thing to their [credit] was when they all started to come out of a certain drift the miners would know that there might be a cave-in in there. The rats would always leave first. But the rats got so numerous somebody brought in a number of white rats,

and the white rats eliminated all of the gray rats. The white rats weren't as pesty as the gray rats. Even years after the mines had closed down white rats lived in the sewers in Virginia City. It was nothing to be walking along a street, and a white rat would show up. On the surface his eyes would be almost pure red from being in the dark so much, and he would look around, then scamper back down his hole again.

Did men ever fall off the cages?

No. They were enclosed.

Could you describe what a safety cage is?

On the top part of the cage where it was hooked to the cable there were 2 huge jaws that worked by a spring. If it happened that the cable would break the springs would be released, and these jaws would spread out and stop the cage in its descent. I don't think there were very many times they were put in use because they took good care of their cables.

Now let's touch on the various occupations in the mine. What were the occupations employed in the upper levels of the mine?

Blacksmith, carpenters. Some mines had machinists and also the assay offices. And the hoist engineers were on the surface [as well as] the timekeepers and the caretaker of the change rooms. Then they had cleanup men so that the mines were always spic and span, cleaned. And I think they always had an office force and the superintendents.

You mentioned the timekeepers. Did the mines work in shifts?

Yes. They worked 24 hours around the clock.

Do you remember when the shifts started and ended?

The day shift was from 7:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon; the afternoon shift was from 3:00 in the afternoon to 11:00 at night; and what they called the graveyard shift was from 11:00 at night to 7:00 in the morning.

Did the men ever take breaks when they were working in the mines?

Yes. They had to. A lot of the work was hard, and the heat would get to them, and they had to have a rest.

Did the men get time off to have their lunch in the mine?

Yes, they would. They took their lunches with them underground, and they had a half-hour lunch on company time.

What did they normally have for lunch down in the mines?

It varied according to the family. There were meat sandwiches, and it was always a treat if your wife or one of your relations made pasties.

What is a pasty?

A pasty [consisted of] small cubes of meat, sliced potatoes and sliced onions mixed together with salt and pepper—sometimes a little parsley was added. This was laid on pie crust dough. Then you would fold up the mixture in the pie crust and bake them in the oven for an hour. They were just as delicious cold as they were hot. This was a Cornish dish. There were a lot of Cornish people here. In

the early days when a man had a pasty in his bucket underground, one of the other Cornish people would look at him and say, “My, you have a letter from home.” [laughter]

We talked about the people that worked on the surface. Now why don’t you tell us what some of the occupations were in the lower levels?

There were your miners. They were the ones that ran the jackhammers and did the drilling. They also did the timber in the mine. Other miners were called muckers. They used a shovel, and they loaded the ore by hand into the ore cars. Then there were the trainers. They took the ore cars when the muckers were finished, and they trammed it on out to the station. Out at the station was the station tender. He pushed the ore cars onto the cage and removed the empty car. There were [also] pipe fitters underground who took care of the fresh air pipes and also the compressed air pipes that operated the drilling machines. And at times they needed tracklayers to put down the track the ore cars ran on. And that about winds up the various occupations of the miners.

Could you describe an average work day at the Hale & Norcross mine?

It was a routine job. You did the same thing day after day. If you were working in a stope the first thing you did when you went into the stope was remove the ore that the shift before had blasted. Then you would start in and put up your square-set timbers and make them real secure. Next you would get out your jackhammer or your stoper—whichever was needed at the time—and put in your round of holes, load the holes with powder, get out of the stope in a hurry and blast. [laughter] If you were a station tender your job all of the

time was to load the cars on the cage. If you were a motorman you were the one on the surface who took the cars and hauled them by the motor out to the mill. It was a routine job. There was one advantage to working underground. No matter how cold it was on the surface you always knew when you went down there you would be working in a warm place. Some parts of the mine were cool on account of their ventilation, but most of the mines were warm no matter what kind of a blizzard was on the surface.

How much were the miners paid in the 1930s?

We were paid \$4.50 a day.

Did the miners ever sing songs when they were on the job?

No. Not in this section of the country.

What did the miners talk about on the job?

Well, they talked about everything but mining, and at home all they would talk about was their mining. [laughter]

Besides the rats, were there any other little animals scurrying around down there in the mines?

One time they brought in green timbers, and this was cut and formed into square-sets. This timber came in out of the woods, and pretty soon we heard a little "Nibble, nibble, nibble." Then there would be a big hole in the timber, and sawdust would be coming out of the timber, and there'd be these grubs! They were about an inch and a half long— the size of a lead pencil. Eventually they became huge, big black flies, and when they nipped you down there you knew you had been bitten.

But it would be quiet down there, and you could hear that little fellow inside the timber doing his own mining.

What did the miners do for fun in the 1930s?

Well, there were pool halls, picture shows, automobile riding and the bars. They managed to have a little recreation after coming out of the mines.

Do you remember the names of any of these establishments?

One was Len Haffey's pool hall. That was on the east side of C Street. It was a huge building probably 50 feet wide and 75 to 80 feet in depth. It had 7 or 8 or 9 pool tables and also a bar. Back in a couple of the corners there were poker tables.

Did the miners like to play poker?

Yes. They were good gamblers. Some of the miners— it was kind of unfortunate— would get paid one day, and then they would go on a big bust that night. Then the next few days they had to bum their friends for a few bucks until the next payday came around.

Did the miners play other card games during the 1930s?

There was poker and pan and....

And what?

Pan. That is a card game. They used about 7 decks of cards. I never got into it. Some places had faro tables and 21 tables.

Were there other pool halls that the miners liked to frequent?

There was one across the street—the Smokery. It was about the same type of operation as Len Haffey’s. It was run by a fellow by the name of Len James.

Did they have glass windows in the front?

Yes. They all had glass windows in the front.

You said the miners liked to frequent several of the taverns in town. Was there a specific one where they liked to go and talk to one another?

Some of them picked out certain bars that they met in. Others just roamed around and took them all in.

Do you remember the names of any of the bars in the 1930s that some of your friends went to?

All of these bars were on the main street—on C Street. We’ll start at the ’62 Bar; that was the farthest one to the south. As we work to the north there was the Washoe Club, then the Crystal Bar, the White Front Bar, the Blue Front Bar, the Pastime Bar, the Smokery, the Sawdust Corner, the Capitol, and far out at the north end was McDevitt’s. That was on the corner of Mill and C streets and was the farthest bar out during the 1930s.

In these bars, when the miners came off of work, all they had to do was walk in the bar, and a whiskey glass and a bottle of whiskey would be put on the bar. The first drink was on the house—no matter what bar you walked into.

Our research indicates that there were different kinds of bars. There was a 1-bit bar and a 2-bit bar. Could you explain what those are?

In the early days all the people had were silver dollars to use, and in order to get

change they took the silver dollars to the blacksmith shop and had it cut in 8 equal pieces. That was the start of the bit, 12½ cents. Two of them would be the 2 bits; 4, the 4 bits; 6, 6 bits; and your dollar. [In a 1-bit bar] your drink would be 12½ cents or 2 for a quarter.

Did the miners have a favorite drink?

Whiskey or boilermakers.

What is a boilermaker?

A boilermaker is a shot of whiskey and a glass of beer to wash it down. In the early days at McGrath’s grocery store they had a 50-gallon barrel [of whiskey] in the back of the store. It was expensive whiskey, and most of the superintendents would get their shot of whiskey here. They would go through the grocery store to the back. They had a dipper with a long handle on it—they called it the “skip”—and they would insert the dipper into the whiskey barrel, take out their shot of whiskey and pour it into a glass.

Then there was another bar on the Divide heading towards Gold Hill run by James Daley. A fellow by the name of Leo Blake went in there. He wanted a shot of whiskey, so they set up the bottle and the glass. Leo had hands on him about the size of an elephant’s hand.. He held the glass of whiskey below his first finger and his thumb and poured the whiskey into the glass. He filled it right up to the level of his fingers, then topped the whiskey off. Then Jim Daley said, “Mr. Blake, I want you to know this is superintendent’s whiskey, and I don’t want no more of your business.” [laughter]

You mentioned McGrath’s. Could you tell us where McGrath’s was located?

McGrath's was on the corner of C and south of Taylor right next door to the Bank of California.

The Bank of California building is still standing?

It's still standing. Above the Bank of California now is Lynn Leong's restaurant, and they have a bar underneath. Next to McGrath's store was the original Crystal Bar.

Did the miners belong to specific social clubs or other kinds of organizations during the 1930s that you can remember?

No. It was pretty quiet here at that time.

The Miners' Union was gone by then.

Yes.

Do you have any idea why it stopped?

All through the history of Virginia City there were rises and falls in the population. That was due to mining. They would run out of ore in one section, and that would hurt the town because they would lay off miners. Then if they struck another good ore body they would put a lot of people back to work again. They had rises and falls [of population] because although the ledge ran all this length, in that ledge the ore [was in pockets]. They would work out all the good ore in one spot, and then they had to prospect again until they would get into another ore body. Then the town would really boom again.

We know that in the early days of the Comstock and even into the 1900s there were numerous social events that the miners participated in. Were these kinds of social events still going on in the 1930s?

They had Fourth of July events that the miners participated in. They used to have 2 boxes made out of timber about 6 feet long, about 5 feet wide and a foot deep. Into this they put a lot of waste rock, and they had what were called mucking contests. The job was to get into one of the boxes that was full of dirt and muck it into the other box. It was a race against time. Another event they had was the tug-of-war. These 2 events were the big thing for the miners.

Well...there was another deal, too. In the early days they had what they called single jacking and double jacking. Now single jacking is when you had a piece of steel in your hand and a small sledgehammer that weighed about 6 or 7 pounds. You had to strike this piece of steel that had a sharp head on it and drill holes into solid rock. There were various lengths of steel, and you would change them as you went along. That was called single jacking. In double jacking there would be a 2-man team, and they would use the same type of steel as in single jacking only they would use a huge sledgehammer. One man would be down on his hands and knees and hold the steel. The other man would swing the sledgehammer to drive the steel. Each time the man with the sledgehammer would hit the steel the man on his knees would give the steel a twist. This was really the same operation as in single jacking only there was a 2-man team.

So the miners still celebrated the Fourth of July in the 1930s?

Oh, yes.

Was the Labor Day celebration still going on?

They had it at times. They would do anything to have a little get-together.

Was St. Patrick's Day very important to the miners in Virginia City?

It was. There were a lot of Irish, so they celebrated St. Patrick's Day. There would always be a St. Patrick's Day dance at the National Guard Hall.

Was the National Guard Hall still standing in the 1930s?

Yes. I can't think of just when it was torn down... somewhere around 1938. I just don't recall the time.

What mines did you work at during the 1930s?

I worked at the Hale & Norcross, and then for a while I went out on my own and did leasing.

What is leasing?

That is where you lease a piece of ground that belongs to somebody else, and you do regular mining work: sink your own shaft, drive your tunnels, look for the ores. And when you hit ore, why, you pay a royalty to the owner of the mine. I did 2 stretches of leasing [at] Hartford and just this side of Silver City. Then I went to work for the Con-Chollar in Gold Hill. I worked at that mine until the war started. World War II put the gold and silver mines off limits.

What did the miners do during the war?

They went into various other occupations. Some went into copper mines or lead mines—strategic materials. I went to work for Uncle Sam in the navy. I worked in the Hawthorne Naval Ammunition Depot. After the V-J

Day I went to work for Beacon Distributing Company. I worked for Beacon Distributing Company for 20 years. Then I was appointed Storey County assessor and worked in the assessor's office for 13 years. Then I retired for 5 years, and a year ago I went back to work for the United Mines down in American Flat again.

Did the mines close down in Virginia City during the Second World War?

Yes. Everything closed. They closed down the gold and silver mines, and Virginia City became a ghost town. There was a shortage of gasoline, and no tourists were coming into town like there is today.

When did tourism become an important industry here?

Various things happened. Lucius Beebe moved into town, and he started the *Territorial Enterprise* again. He was quite a booster. He was one of the starters of tourism. Then one of the other great things that started a lot of tourists [coming here] was the television show "Bonanza." People all over the world saw "Bonanza" and came here to see things.

Could you describe Lucius Beebe?

He was a good-sized man. He was pleasant to talk to, and if you had anything to tell him he always took time to listen. He kept pretty much to himself. He lived on the corner of A and Union Street in a 2-story house. I think it is number 2 South A Street.

I've been told that a number of artists moved into Virginia City. Do you know anything about that?

Through the summer months art teachers move into Virginia City. The old county hospital down on S Street east of town has been repaired, and the art people will move in there. It is a colony. They will be here for about a week at a time. When the teachers move in they have already signed up their pupils to take the art class they are teaching. Sometimes it is watercolors; other times it's oils and various types of painting—whatever they happen to specialize in.

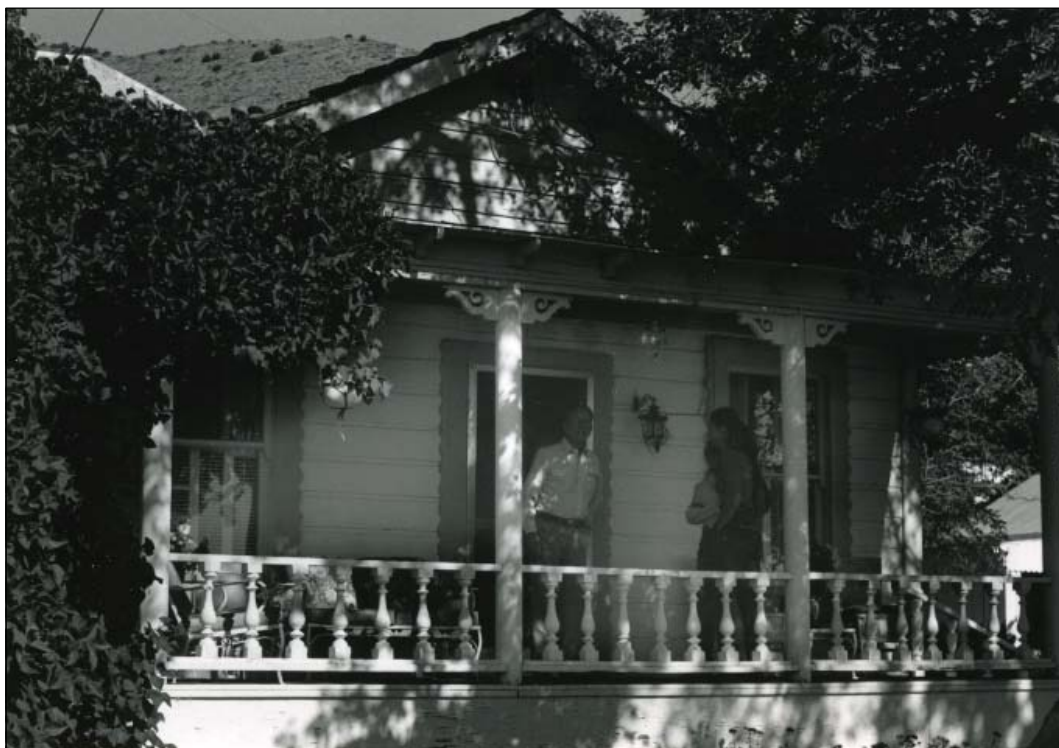
I would like to thank you very much for sharing your knowledge with us. As I told you, we were pleased to have found a miner for our project because mining was such an important aspect of Virginia City's history. Thank you very much.

It has been a pleasure.

PHOTOGRAPHS



The Miners' Union Hall "is still standing
in very good condition."



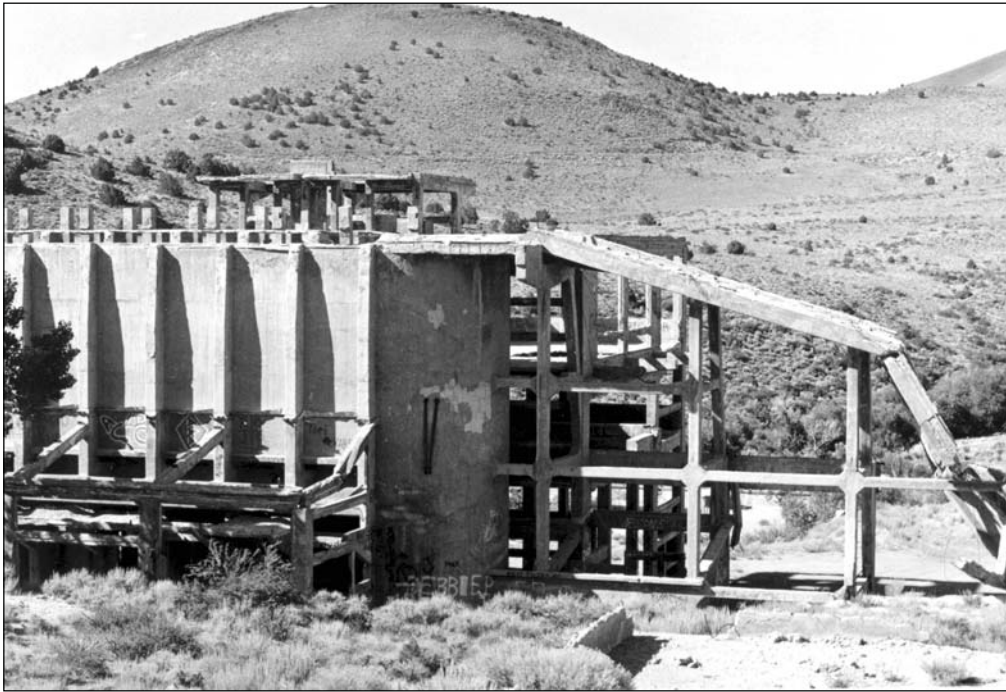
“I eventually constructed my house...
on the timbers of the old Crown Point trestle.”



"The first cables they used [in the mines] were flat cables."



Interviewer Ann Harvey stands by an ore car in a single-deck mine cage.



At the American Flat mill “the ore train had to go up a platform about 250 feet high [from which] the ore was dumped into the ore bins.”

Photographs by of N.J. Broughton.

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